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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5866  
INFO RUEHAS/AMEMBASSY ALGIERS IMMEDIATE 4325  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE 3231  
RUEHNK/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT IMMEDIATE 3426  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS IMMEDIATE 4540  
RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS IMMEDIATE 9211  
RUEHCL/AMCONSUL CASABLANCA IMMEDIATE 2686

C O N F I D E N T I A L RABAT 000315

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STATE FOR NEA/MAG, DRL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/14/2011

TAGS: PHUM PREL MO

SUBJECT: DRL-FUNDED NGO EMPOWERED TO PROMOTE PRISON REFORM

REF: A. 05 RABAT 02287

¶B. 06 RABAT 01063

Classified By: Political Counselor Craig Karp, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶11. (C) Summary: USG assistance has succeeded in empowering a Moroccan non-governmental organization (NGO) to promote prison reform. The Moroccan Observatory of Prisons (OMP) has a mission to improve prisoners lives and prison conditions. In the past year, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL) funded assistance has helped develop OMP's administrative and financial management, a regional legal network, a complaint process system, and, improved OMP's outreach and communication skills. In order for OMP to have a decisive impact, however, it must develop a sustainable, effective working relationship with the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), Directorate of Prisons. We judge that the MOJ is open to such input; it has been working to improve the generally poor prison conditions, in large part by building new prisons. End Summary.

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The Moroccan Observatory of Prisons  
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¶12. (SBU) In February 2006, Management Systems International (MSI) received a DRL grant for eighteen months to support the OMP, a NGO focusing on prisoners' rights and prison conditions. In the first year of the grant, MSI has made significant progress in developing OMP into a well-organized, responsive organization. Before working with MSQOMP was a loosely organized group of volunteers without structure, including administrative and financial management, communication skills and strategic planning, it is quickly becoming a stronger NGO which will likely have an impact on how the Government of Morocco (GOM) acts to improve the penitentiary system (reftels A, B).

¶13. (SBU) The OMP now has a full-time director and a small staff at its Casablanca office. This team and the board of directors received management training, including administration, financial and team-building skills. With MSI's guidance, OMP defined its advocacy role with prisoners and their families needed to be enhanced through training lawyers on prisoners' rights. OMP launched an outreach program to lawyers throughout the country, who form the core of the developing regional network. Over the next few months, this network will be extended to include doctors and dentists, who will serve the prisoner population.

¶4. (SBU) OMP developed a prisoner complaint process. These complaints are processed and statistics are recorded to be presented in the annual report. Since May, 2006, OMP has processed 142 complaints. Most complaints relate to physical mistreatment and the lack of provision of adequate health care in the prisons. Families frequently suspect that death of a prisoner is at the hands of the prison authorities and say that prisoners are on hunger strikes. Poor conditions during initial detention, forbidding family visits, deprivation of the prisoners' rights, and being transferred to prisons too far away from the families are also among the complaints. (Note: According to the penal code, a prisoner can be imprisoned near his family. End Note.) Prisoners and/or their family members frequently also ask OMP judicial procedure questions, and, as well, prisoners ask OMP to be in the intermediary for them when requesting amnesty or the ability to participate in programs that will assist them when their sentences are completed.

¶5. (SBU) OMP believes that prisoners and their families are afraid to exercise their rights. For this reason, MSI is assisting OMP in developing an outreach/communication strategy consisting of a brochure detailing OMP's activities and a help card. The brochure will be in French and Arabic; the help card will be in Arabic. With increased visibility, OMP will be able to assist more prisoners and, consequently, encourage support from other sponsors.

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Comment:  
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¶6. (C) While OMP is now better prepared, it has so far had limited impact on prison conditions. MSI is doing an excellent job in building OMP's capacity, but, the OMP must strive to form a partnership with the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), Directorate of Prisons. The MOJ (reftel A) fully recognizes its lack of resources, and, has successfully launched new programs in the last year. Thirteen new prisons have been opened since 2003 and construction on eight more was started at the end of 2006; and, as well, six educational centers have been opened. OMP board members have taken an "anti-government" stance and are presently adverse to developing a relationship with the MOJ.

¶7. (C) OMP, like most organizations in Morocco, makes decisions based on its own statistics. The country lacks an effective and objective "statistics bureau." In its 2005 annual report, made public in October, the OMP, based on limited information, e.g., less than the 142 complaints reported by the end of 2006, criticized the MOJ. The press conference for the release of the report certainly raised public awareness about prison and prisoner conditions. It did not, however, establish a framework to work with the MOJ to achieve mutually defined goals, rather it intensified the adversarial role OMP played prior to the MSI interventions. (End Note: Anecdotally, the relationship between OMP and the MOJ is adversarial only because of individual attitudes in both organizations. End Note.) End Comment.

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